

# DECORATIVE ART OF NEW GUINEA

## INCISED DESIGNS

*by*

ALBERT BUELL LEWIS

Assistant Curator of Melanesian Ethnology

52 Plates

Frontispiece in Photogravure and 2 Text-figures



BERTHOLD LAUFER

Curator of Anthropology

EDITOR

ANTHROPOLOGY DESIGN SERIES NO. 4

FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

CHICAGO

1925

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NATIVE USING A BOAR'S TUSK, SHARPENED ON THE EDGE AS A KNIFE, TO TRIM DOWN AN ARROW POINT.



MEN WITH SPEARS.

Manam, North Coast, New Guinea.

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# DECORATIVE ART OF NEW GUINEA

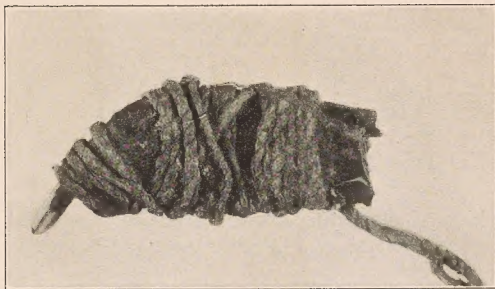
## INCISED DESIGNS

The practice of decorating various objects with ornamental designs is not limited to civilized peoples. The natives of New Guinea, though having no metals of any kind (till iron was introduced a few years ago by traders), yet developed the art of wood carving to a marvelous degree; nor is this art everywhere the same, for different areas show absolutely different types of workmanship and design. Quite a number of such areas are easily distinguishable in New Guinea and the near-by islands, so distinct in character that any decorated object can easily be assigned to its proper place of origin.

In these pages it is possible to give but a few examples of New Guinea art, hence the material has been limited to certain smaller incised ornamental designs which can be reproduced, largely from rubbings, very nearly the size of the originals now in the collections of Field Museum. As there is unending variation in detail, only a few typical designs can be shown from each region. The series from north-coast spears gives most of the important variations, however. The ornament on the title page is from the handle of a club from the Trobriand Islands, east of New Guinea.

The areas where wood carving is most highly developed in New Guinea are the central north coast, Huon Gulf, and the eastern end, known as the Massim district. While numerous designs are given from these three districts, the ornamented objects in each case are different. This does not mean that such objects are used in only the one district, but that in the working out of applied design, its highest development has been in connection with different classes of objects in the different districts. Coconut-shell cups, for example, are extensively used throughout the coastal areas of New Guinea, and in many places are more or less decorated; but in no other region is the decoration so varied and elaborate as in Huon Gulf. It is also of interest to note that nearly all the best of this work is done on the small island of Tami, or in a single village on the mainland, Taminugatu, where Tami islanders have settled. The highest development of a particular art is not only limited to a certain area, but to certain villages, sometimes a single village, within that area. This serves then as a center from which the surrounding region obtains its supply. Nor does specialization end here, for not all the native workmen are of equal skill, and some become especially known for their excellent workmanship. Original geniuses are not unknown, and in at least one well-authenticated case all the finest carvings of a certain type found in a large district were traced to a single individual, who originated that style of workmanship, which perished with his death.

Most of the designs here reproduced appear to be purely decorative and are typical conventional designs of the region where used. The natives often, if not usually, have definite names for the commonly repeated elements of a



CARVING TOOL.

An incisor tooth, with a portion of the jaw of a small marsupial, wrapped with cord, to serve as a handle.  
Huon Gulf, New Guinea.

Actual size.

design, corresponding to our fret, scroll, etc., and with no more realistic meaning than we ascribe to such terms. On the other hand, certain designs, especially these representing the human figure, in whole or in part, may have a definite ceremonial or religious meaning. For example, while the geometric design on a spear, such as Fig. 6, Plate II, appears to be purely decorative, the small figure of a human being shown near the point represents the guiding force or

spirit which is supposed to direct the spear to its proper destination. Such meanings are especially found in connection with ceremonial and religious objects.

The designs may be roughly divided into two classes, which are also recognized by the natives themselves—conventionalized geometric and realistic, the latter often much conventionalized in execution. The origin of the latter is usually evident, though not always, especially on ceremonial objects. As to the former, which the natives declare is simply "to make him look pretty," all attempts at a realistic interpretation are pure speculation. Most of the designs which follow fall in this class.

At present the natives use iron very extensively, and most of the objects here illustrated were probably carved with knives or iron in some form. This does not mean that they are any better made, however, than when iron was unknown, and the original stone, shell, or tooth instrument was used. Usually the contrary is true, as the people do not take the time at present to do careful work. The heavier and coarser work was done with stone axes, adzes, and chisels, while small stones, shell, and especially teeth were used for the finer.

Illustrations of New Guinea carvings and designs may be found scattered in many publications on that region, especially the following: "The Decorative Art of British New Guinea," by A. C. Haddon (Dublin, 1894); "Neu-Guinea," by Ernst Fuhrman (Hagen, 1922, good only for illustrations); and "Der Kaiserin-Augusta-Fluss," by Otto Reche (Hamburg, 1913).



CARVING TOOLS.

Each consists of two boar's tusks fastened together. In one case the points have been extensively ground down by sharpening. Sepik River.

About  $\frac{1}{2}$  actual size.

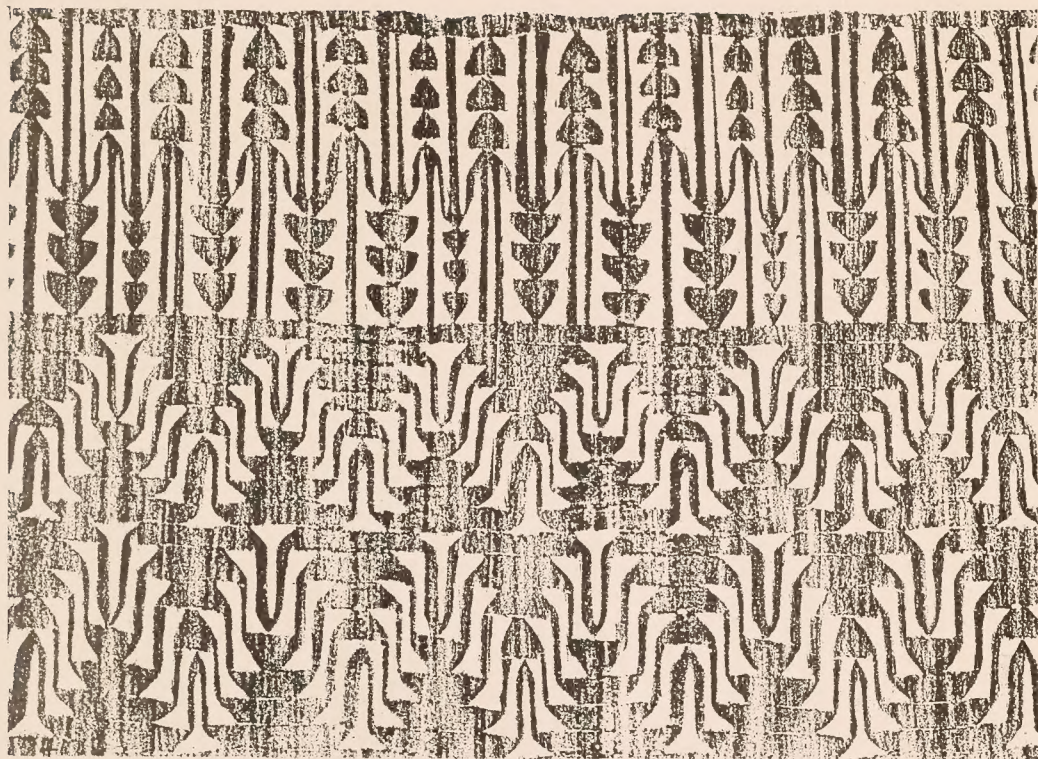




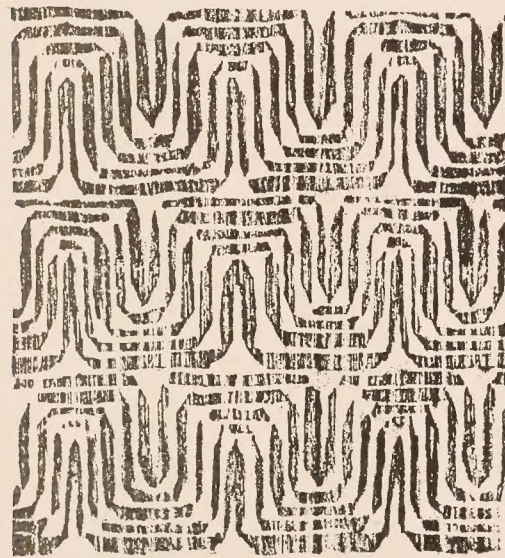
SPEARS FROM THE NORTH COAST, NEW GUINEA.

Spears from this region are usually ornamented with incised designs in two places on the shaft, as in Fig. 6. The lower portion of the upper band of several spears is shown in Figs. 1-5. Rubbings from these spears are reproduced in the following plates: Fig. 1 in Plate V, Fig. 1; Fig. 2 in Plate VIII, Fig. 3; Fig. 3 in Plate XVIII, Fig. 5; Fig. 5 in Plate XI, Fig. 1. Fig. 6 is a sketch of the same spear (Fig. 5). Figs. 1-5 are three-fourths actual size; Fig. 6, one-fifteenth.





1



2

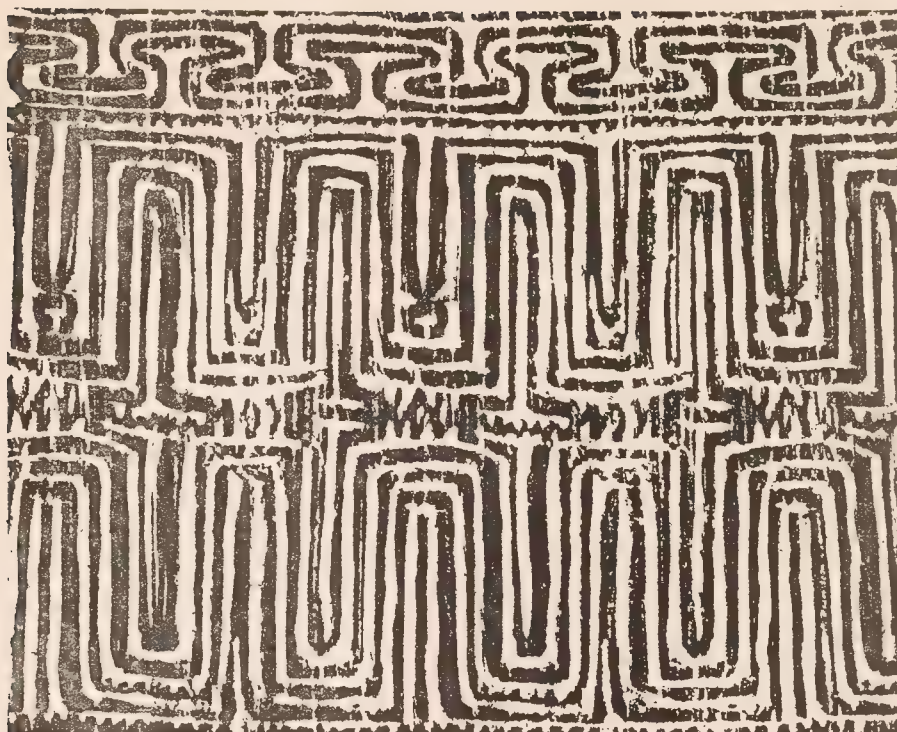


3

SPEAR DESIGNS FROM THE NORTH COAST, NEW GUINEA.

To better show the character of these designs the rubbing has been continued around the spear, so the design is repeated—in Fig. 1 slightly more than three times. Slightly reduced in size.





2



3

SPEAR DESIGNS FROM THE NORTH COAST, NEW GUINEA.



1

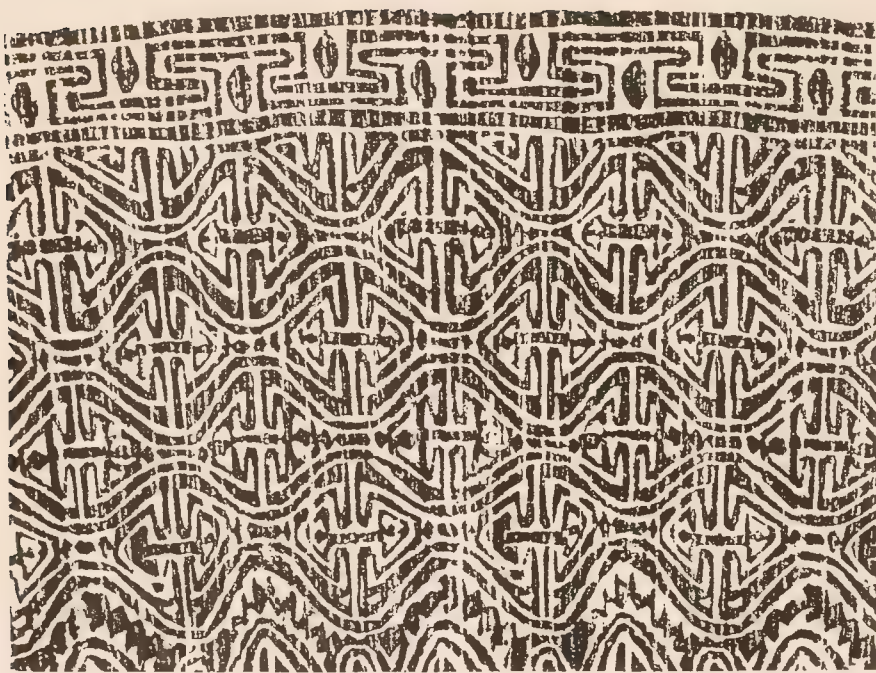


2

SPEAR DESIGNS FROM THE NORTH COAST, NEW GUINEA.

Fig. 1 is a rubbing of a portion of the design shown in Fig. 1, Plate II.



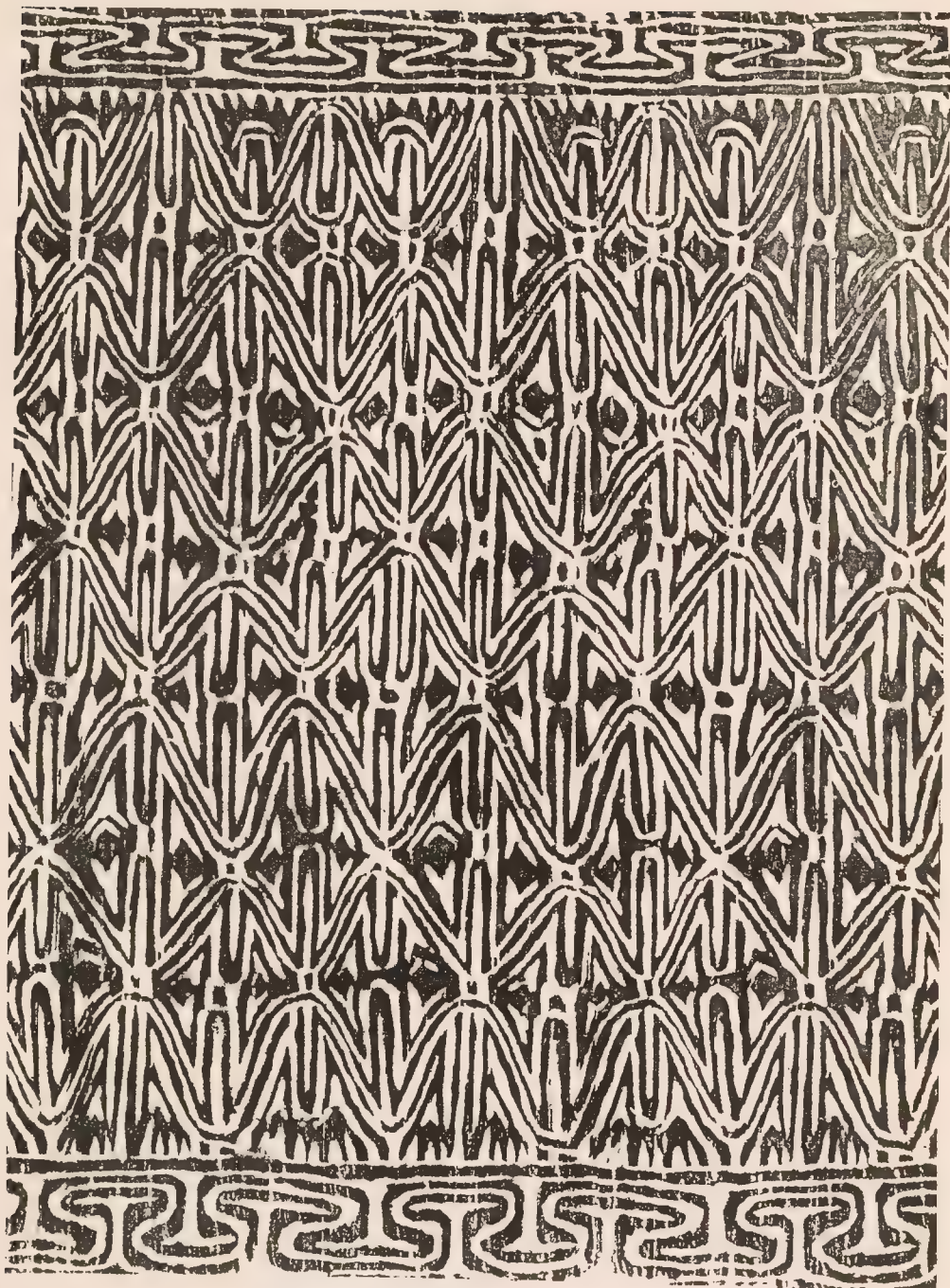


1



2

SPEAR DESIGNS FROM THE NORTH COAST, NEW GUINEA.



SPEAR DESIGN FROM THE NORTH COAST, NEW GUINEA.

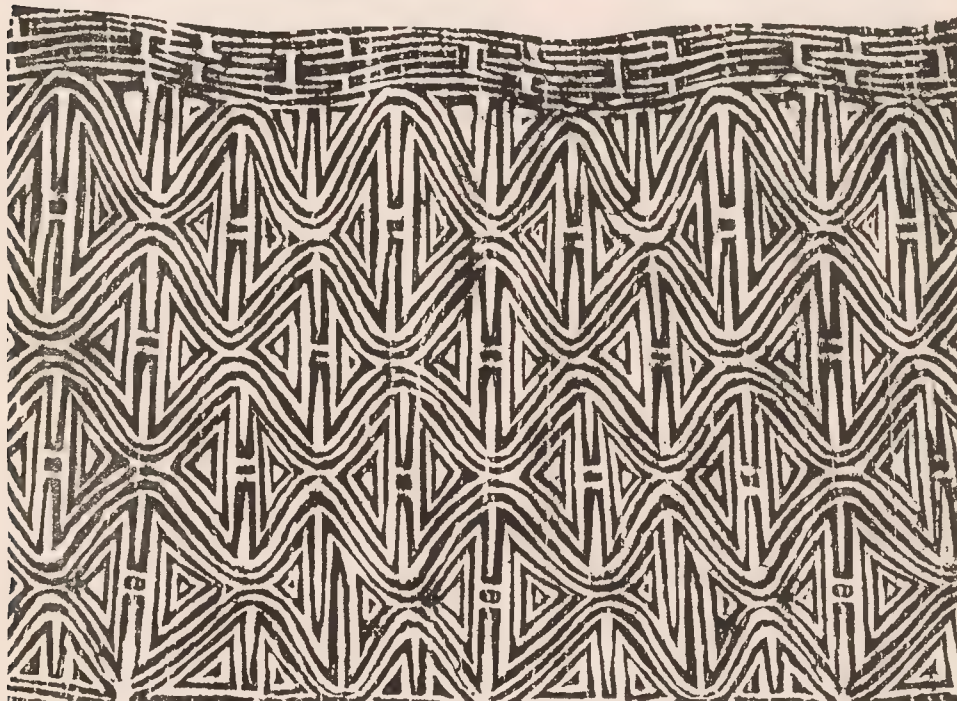




1



2

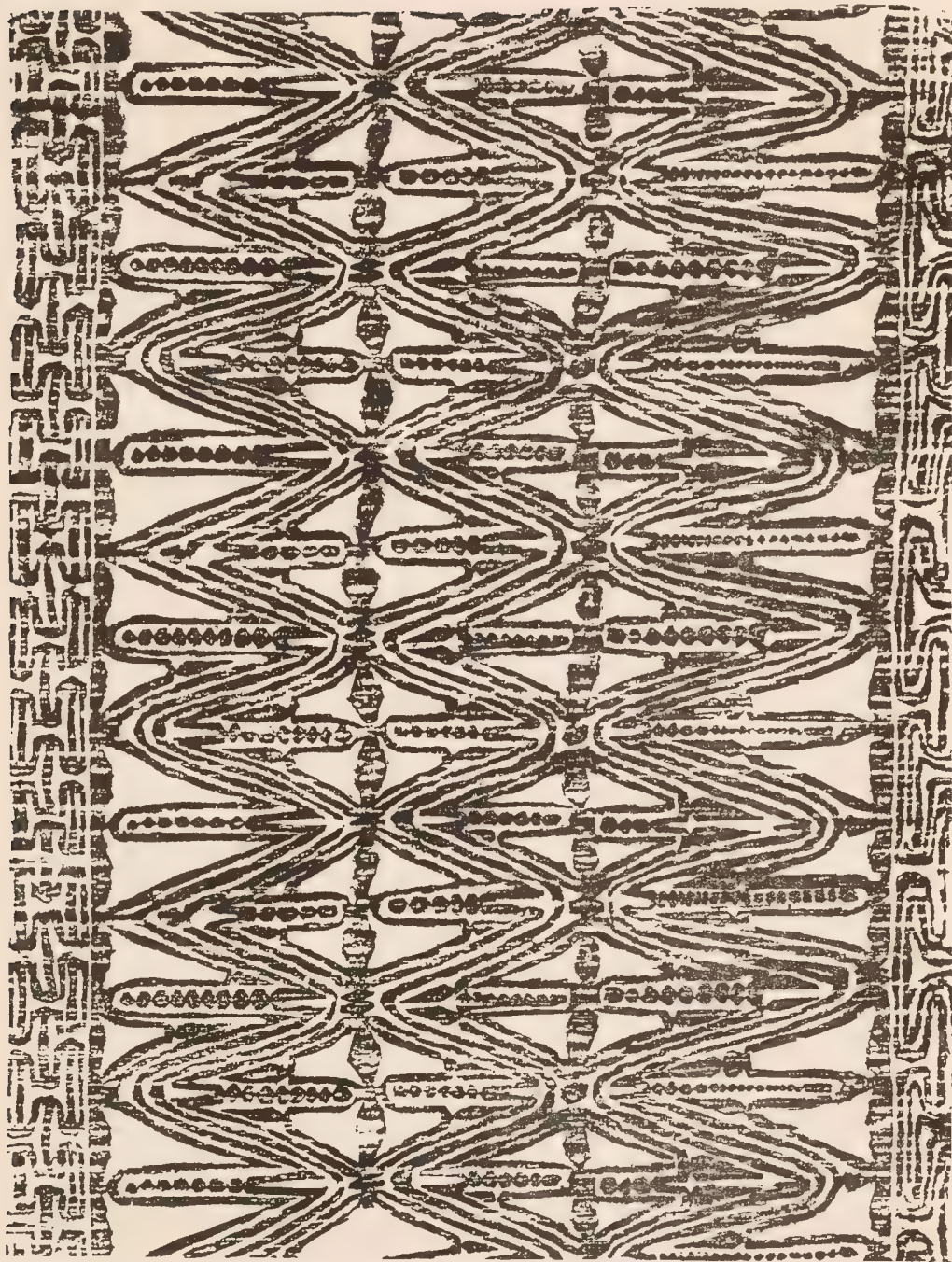


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SPEAR DESIGNS FROM THE NORTH COAST, NEW GUINEA.

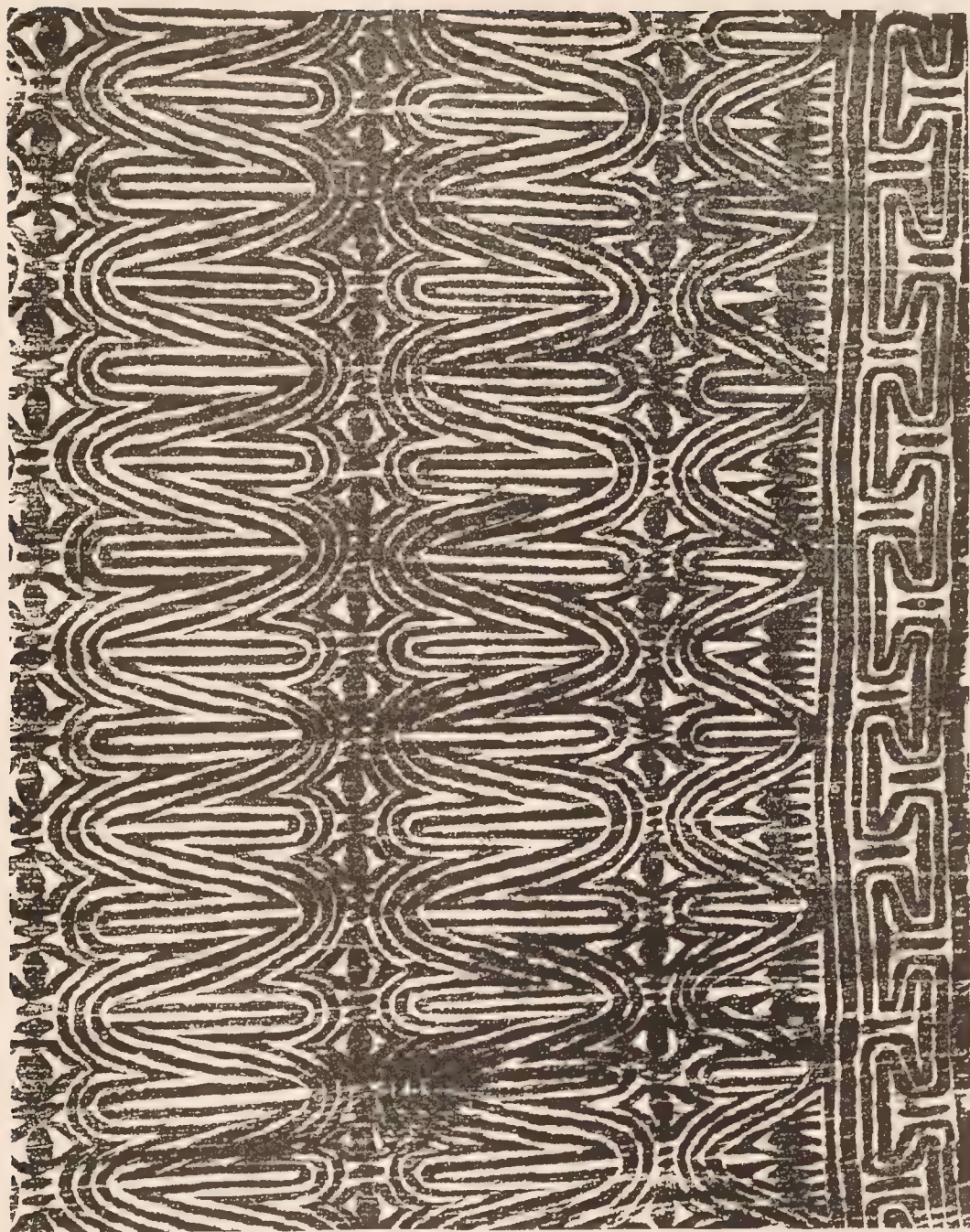
Fig. 3 is a rubbing of a portion of the design shown in Fig. 2, Plate II.





SPEAR DESIGN FROM THE NORTH COAST, NEW GUINEA.





SPEAR DESIGN FROM THE NORTH COAST, NEW GUINEA.





1



2

SPEAR DESIGNS FROM THE NORTH COAST, NEW GUINEA.

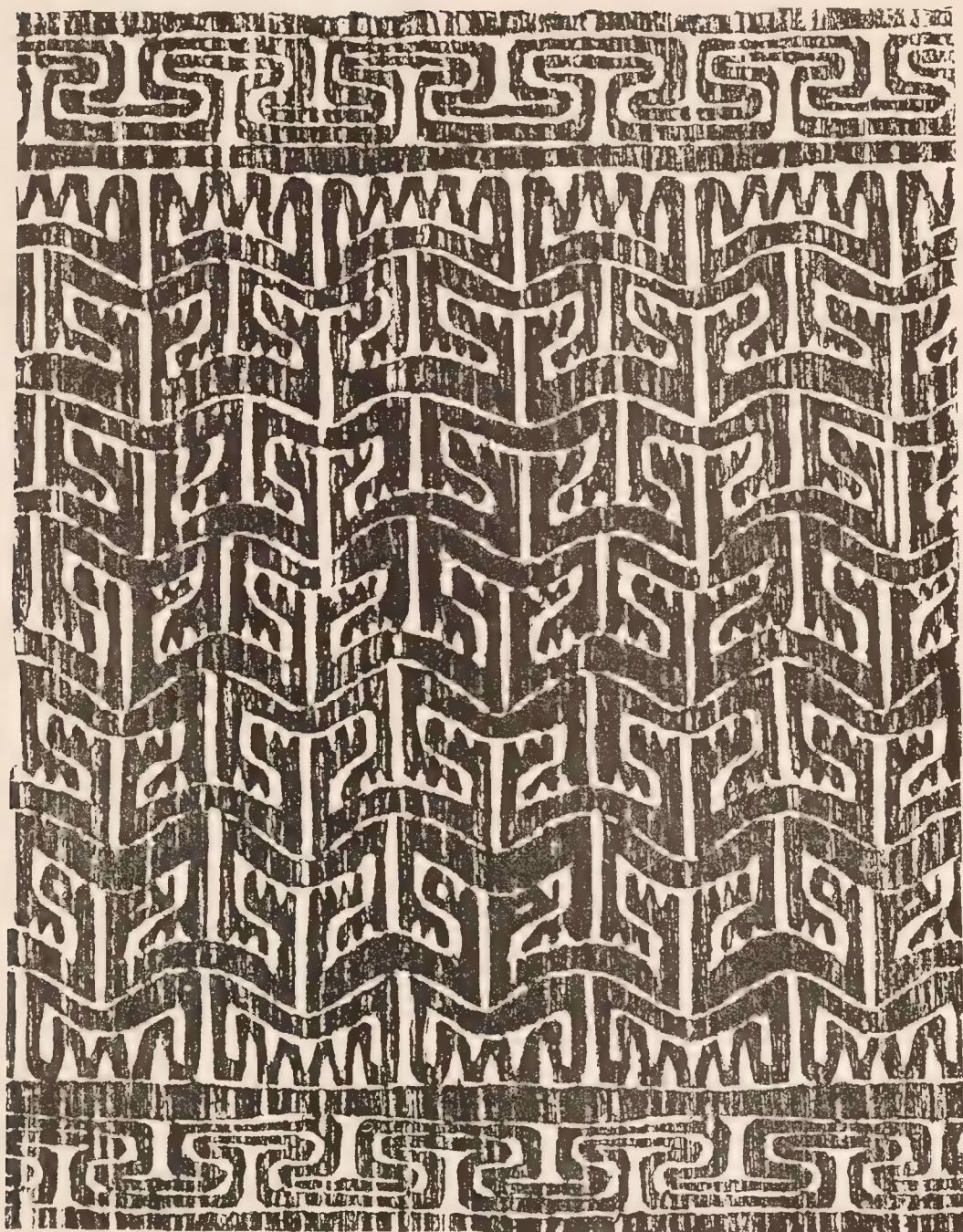
Fig. 1 is a rubbing of a portion of the design shown in Fig. 5, Plate II.





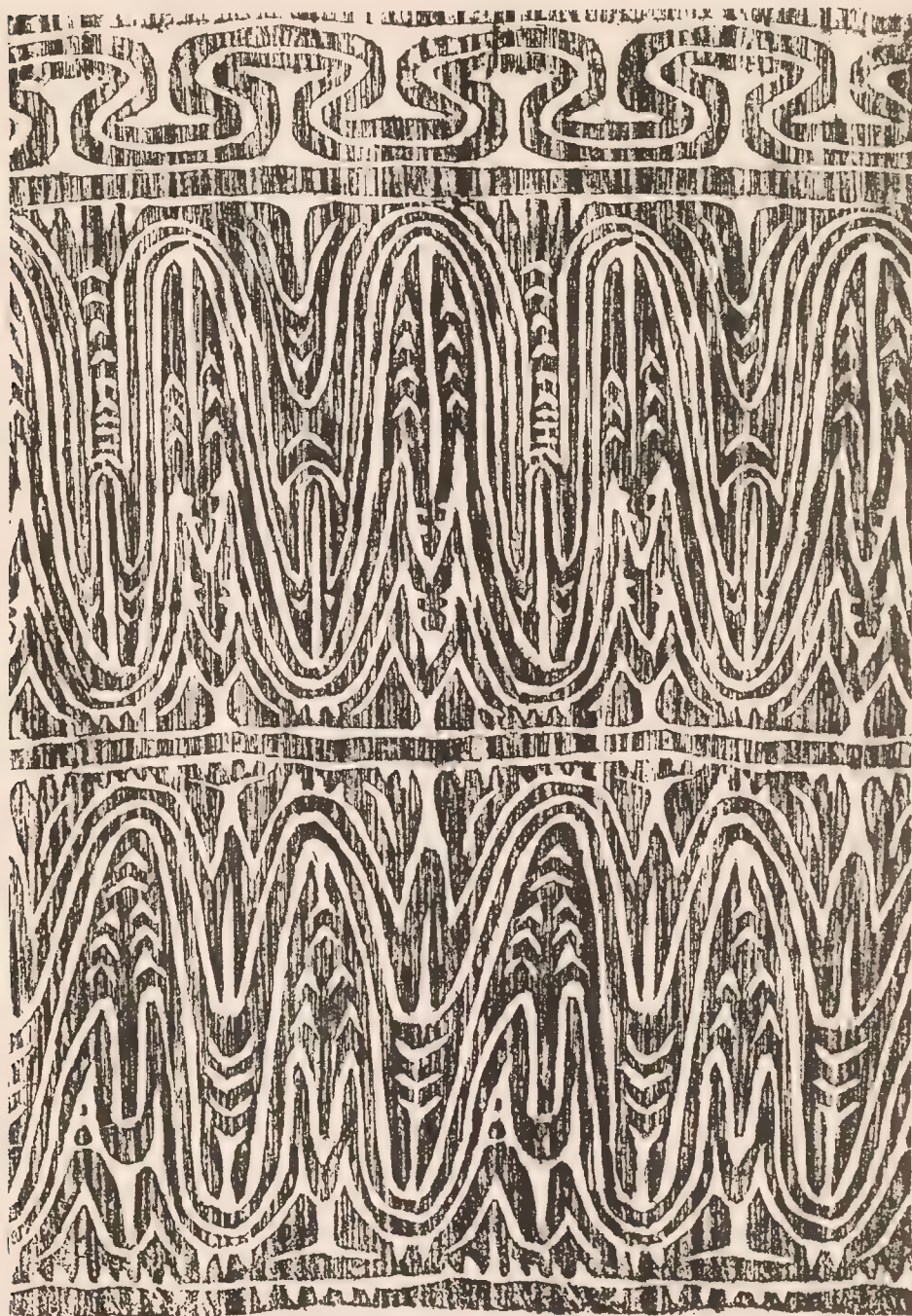
SPEAR DESIGN FROM THE NORTH COAST, NEW GUINEA.



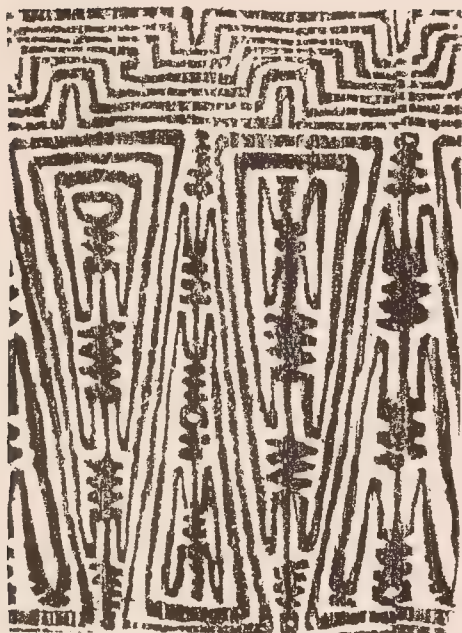


SPEAR DESIGN FROM THE NORTH COAST, NEW GUINEA.

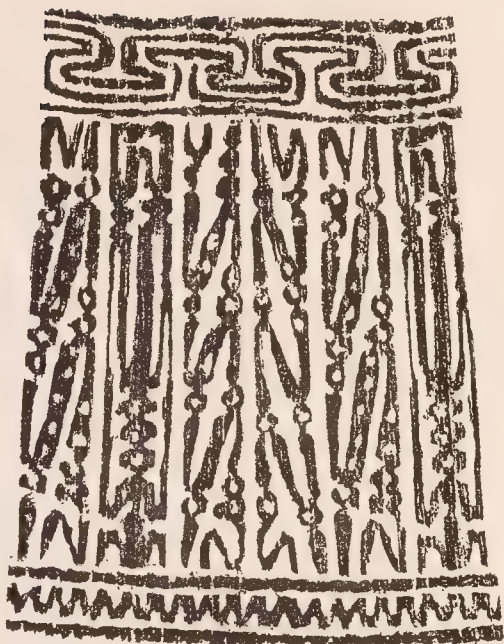




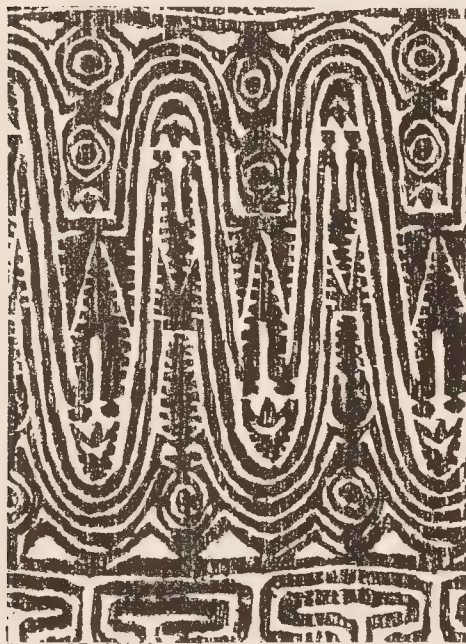
SPEAR DESIGN FROM THE NORTH COAST, NEW GUINEA.



1



2



3



4



5

SPEAR DESIGNS FROM THE NORTH COAST, NEW GUINEA.

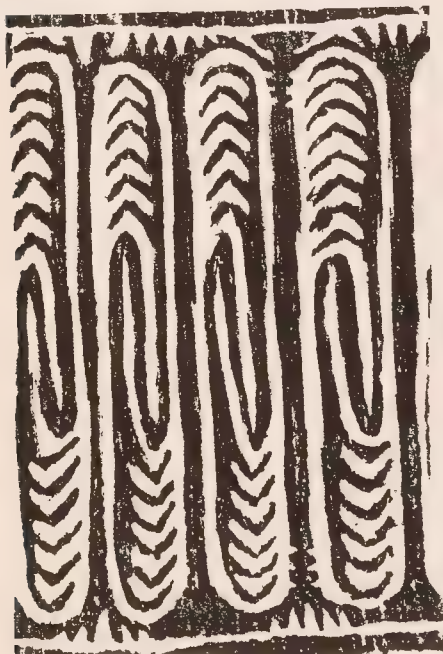




1



3



2



4

SPEAR DESIGNS FROM THE NORTH COAST, NEW GUINEA.



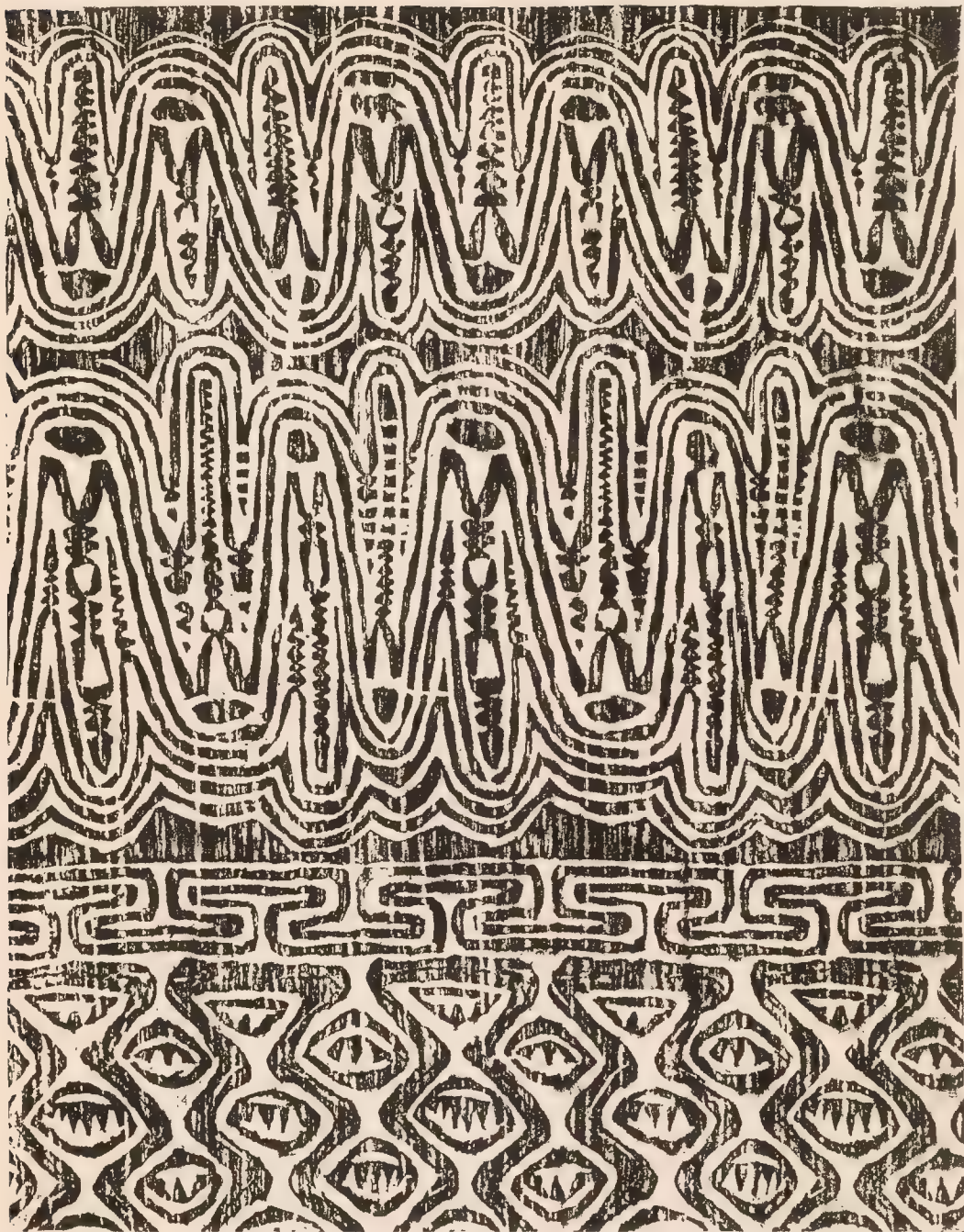
1



2

SPEAR DESIGNS FROM THE NORTH COAST, NEW GUINEA.





SPEAR DESIGN FROM THE NORTH COAST, NEW GUINEA.

This is a rubbing of the central portion of the design shown in Fig. 3, Plate II.





1



2



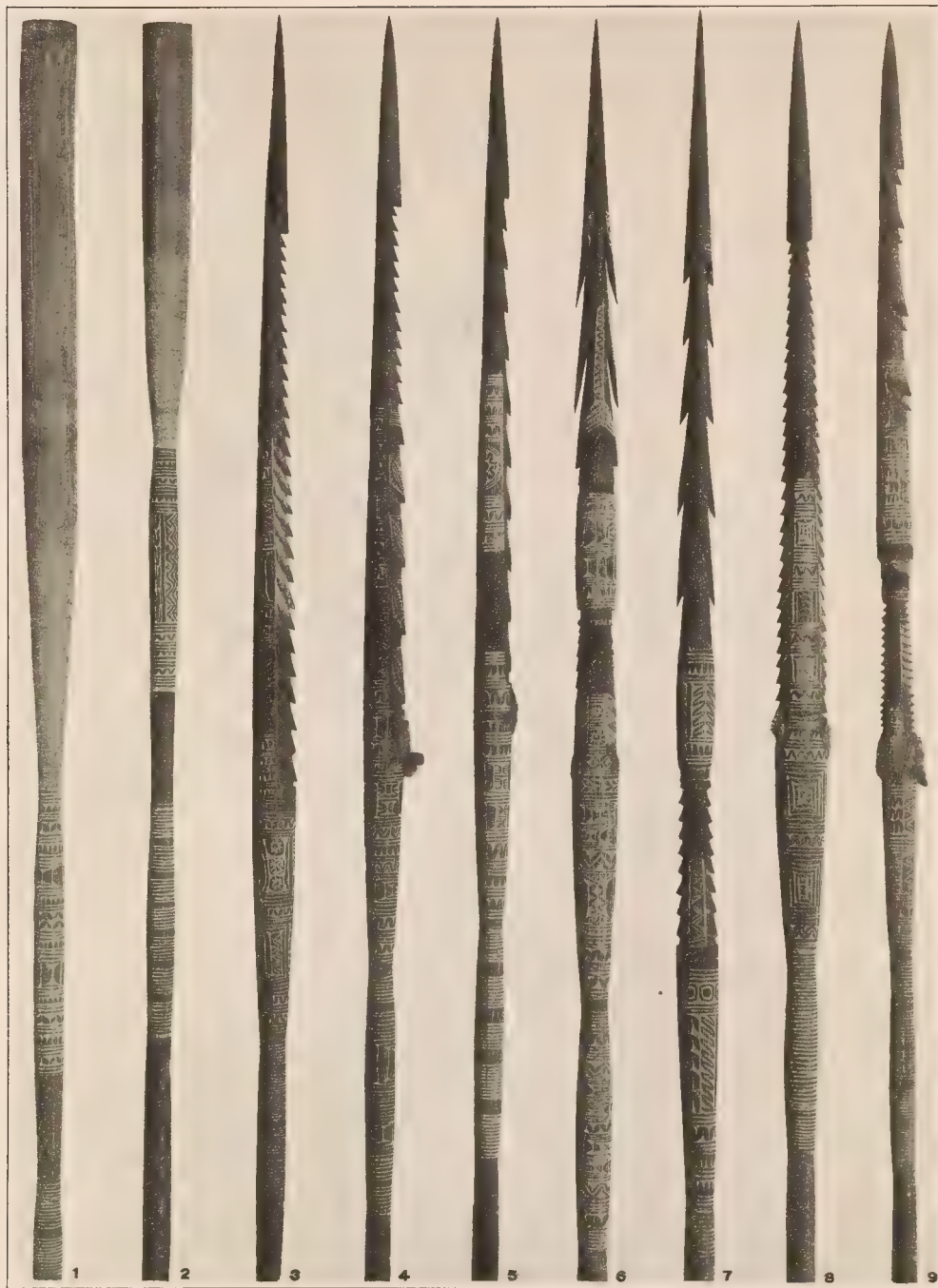
3

SPEAR DESIGNS FROM THE NORTH COAST, NEW GUINEA.





SPEAR DESIGN FROM THE NORTH COAST, NEW GUINEA.



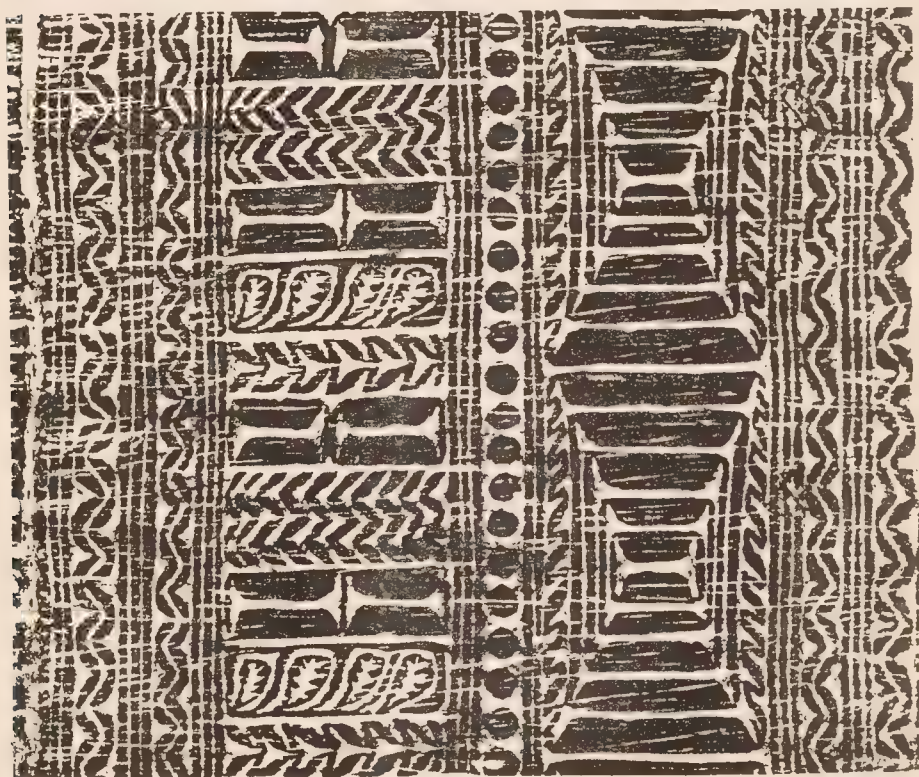
SPEARS FROM ST. MATTHIAS.

Only the front and rear ends (Figs. 1 and 2) are shown, as the central portion is not decorated. The incised portions are whitened by filling them with lime. One-fifth actual size.





1



2

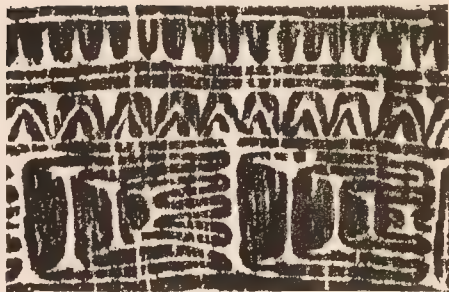
SPEAR DESIGNS FROM ST. MATTHIAS.

These are similar to those shown on Plate XXI. Actual size.





1



2



3



4



5

## DESIGNS FROM ST. MATTHIAS.

Figs. 1 and 2 are from spears, Figs. 3-5 from small dancing sticks. Fig. 3 shows the two sides of a flattened stick with rounded sides. Figs. 4-5, the four sides of two squared sticks. Actual size.





DESIGNS ON DANCING STICKS FROM ST. MATTHIAS.

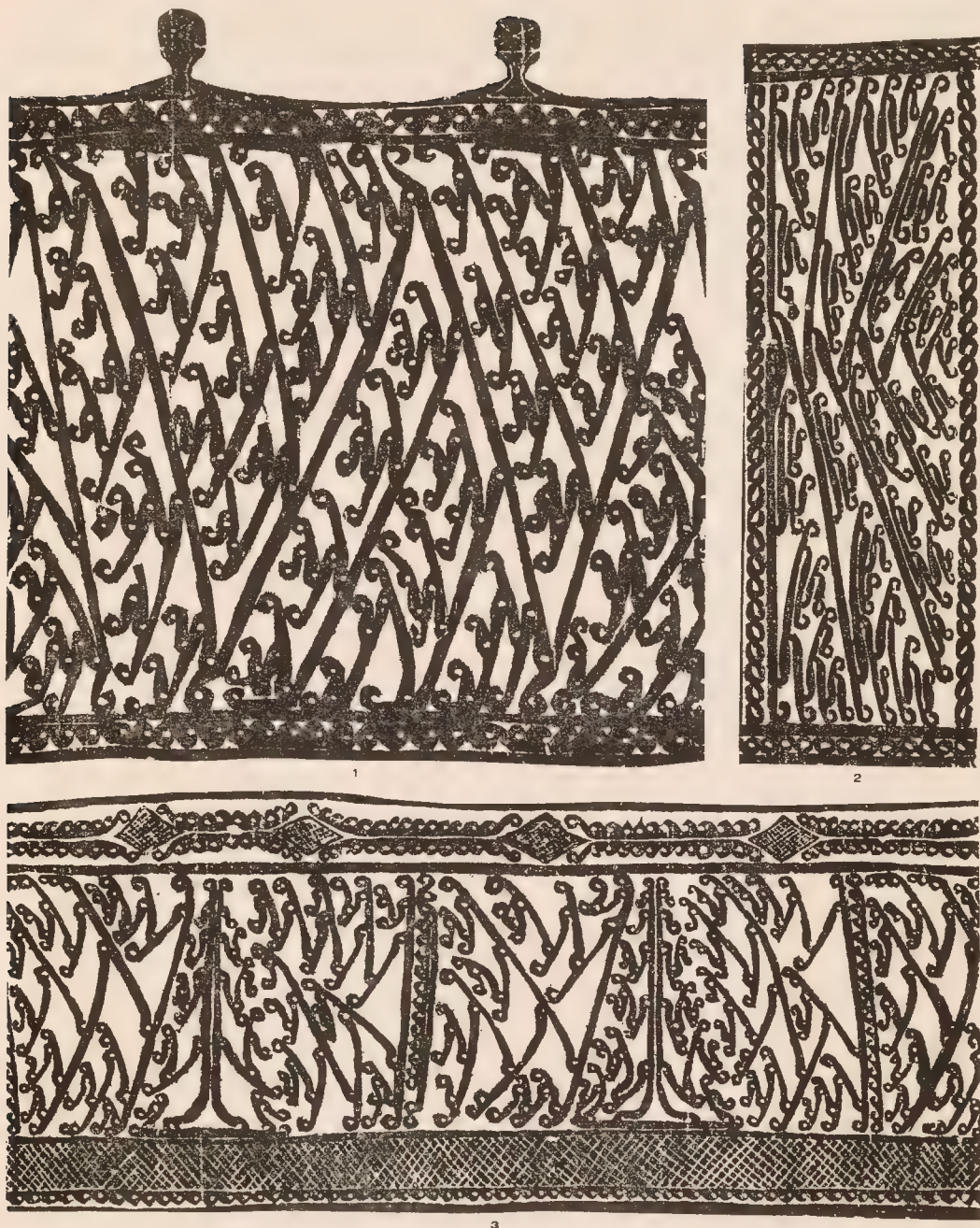
The bottom of Fig. 2 joins the top of Fig. 3. The half-tone reproduced from a photograph (Fig. 1) shows how the design is made to stand out by filling the incisions with lime. Fig. 1 is two-fifths actual size; Figs. 2-4 about three-fourths.



ORNAMENTED BAMBOO BOXES.

A rubbing of No. 2 is shown in Fig. 1, Plate XXVI; and of parts of No. 3 in Figs. 2 and 4, Plate XXVII. Geelvink Bay, Dutch New Guinea. Slightly reduced in size.





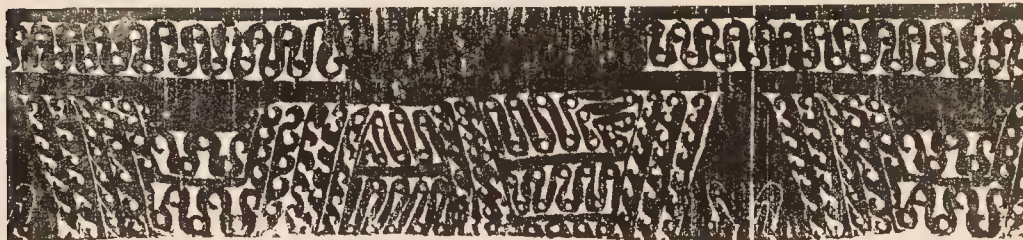
DESIGNS FROM BAMBOO BOXES.

Fig. 1 is from No. 2, Plate XXV. Geelvink Bay, Dutch New Guinea. Two-thirds actual size.





1



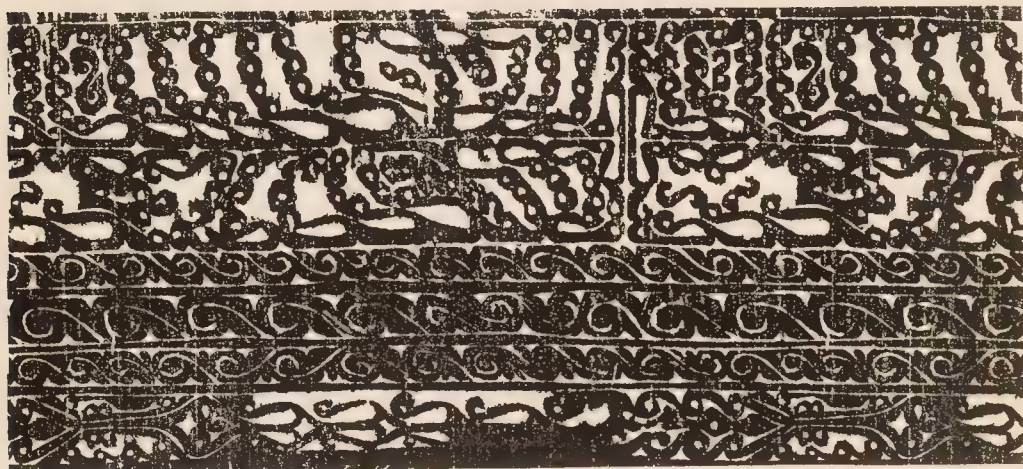
2



3



4



5

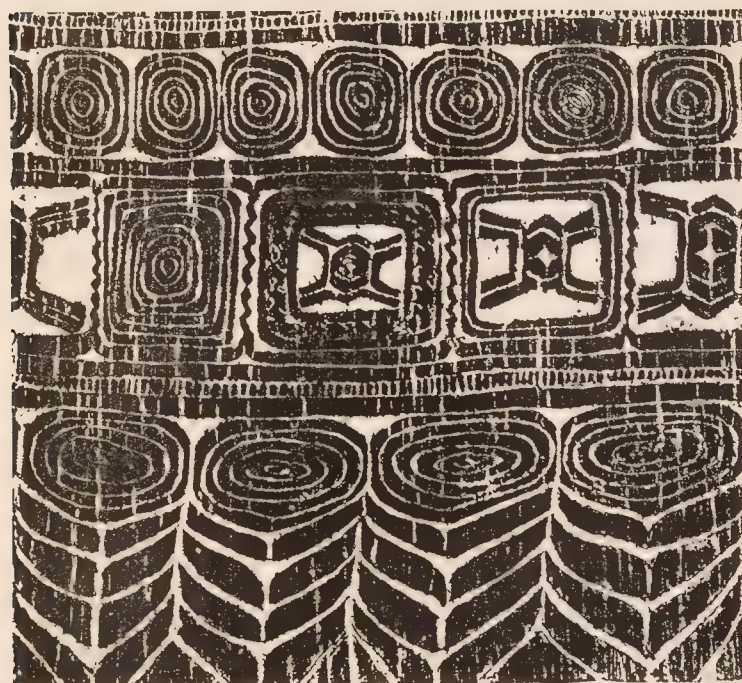
## DESIGNS FROM BAMBOO BOXES.

Fig. 2 is from the top of No. 3, Plate XXV, while Fig. 4 shows a portion of one side. Geelvink Bay, Dutch New Guinea. Actual size.





1



2



3

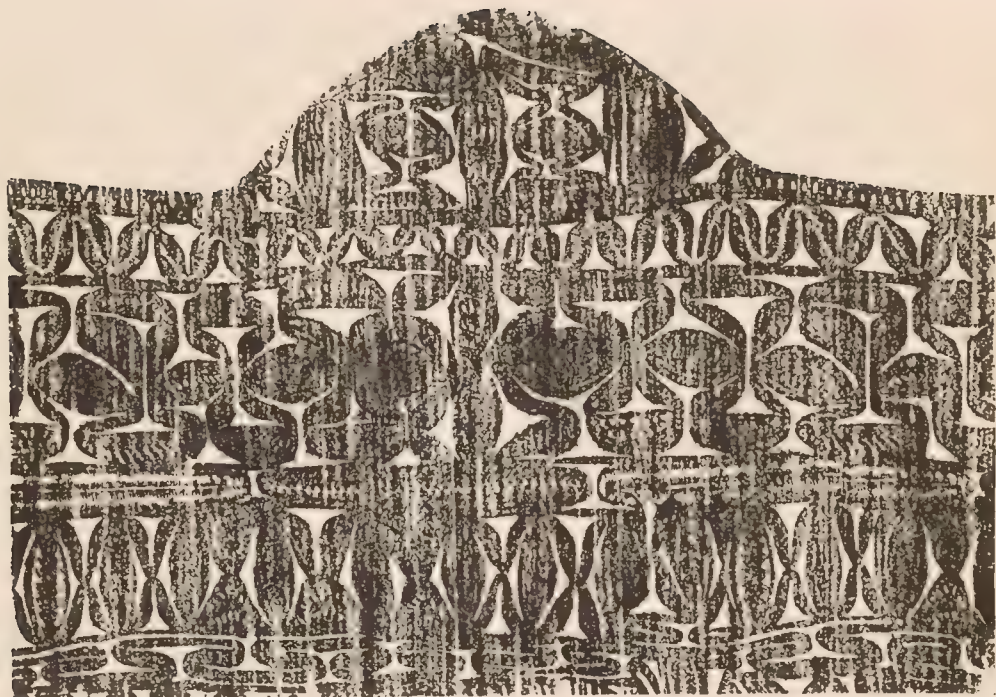


4

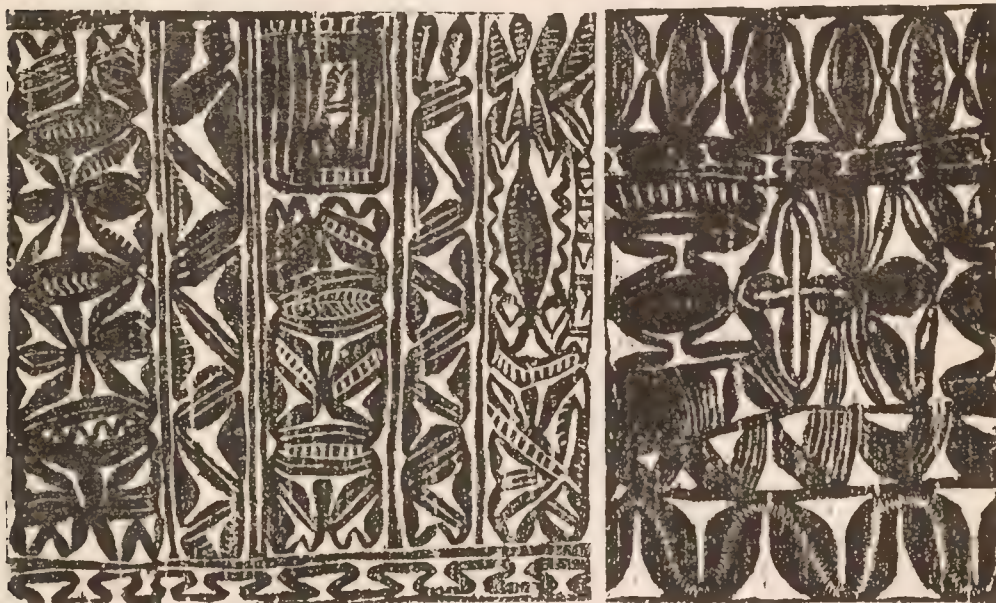
## INCISED DESIGNS ON BAMBOO.

Fig. 1. Portion of design from tobacco-pipe from Mekeo, British New Guinea. Figs. 2-4 from bamboo boxes from northern Dutch New Guinea. Slightly reduced.





1



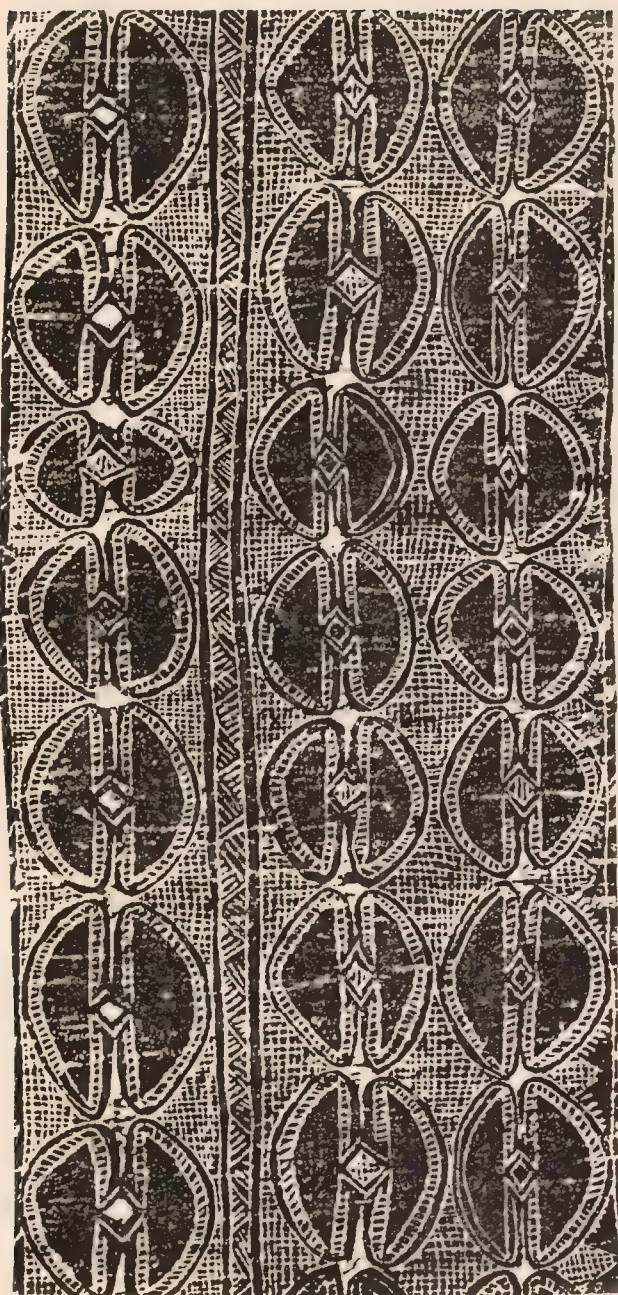
2

3

DESIGNS FROM BAMBOO BOXES.

From the Hula, north of Huai Gu, New Guinea. Slightly reduced.





1



2

DESIGNS FROM BAMBOO BOXES FROM BOUGAINVILLE, SOLOMON ISLANDS.

Actual size.





DANCE SHIELDS FROM THE TROBRIAND ISLANDS, EASTERN NEW GUINEA.

These are usually painted with red and black, and the incisions filled with lime, as is the case with No. 2, while No. 1 has been carved, but otherwise unfinished. One-third actual size.





DESIGN ON DANCE SHIELD.

This is a rubbing of the back side of the lower half of Fig. 2, Plate XXXI. As the carving is at different levels, it is impossible to get a clear rubbing. Three fourths actual size.



ORNAMENTAL CARVING FROM THE TROBRIAND ISLANDS, EASTERN NEW GUINEA.

Two-thirds actual size.

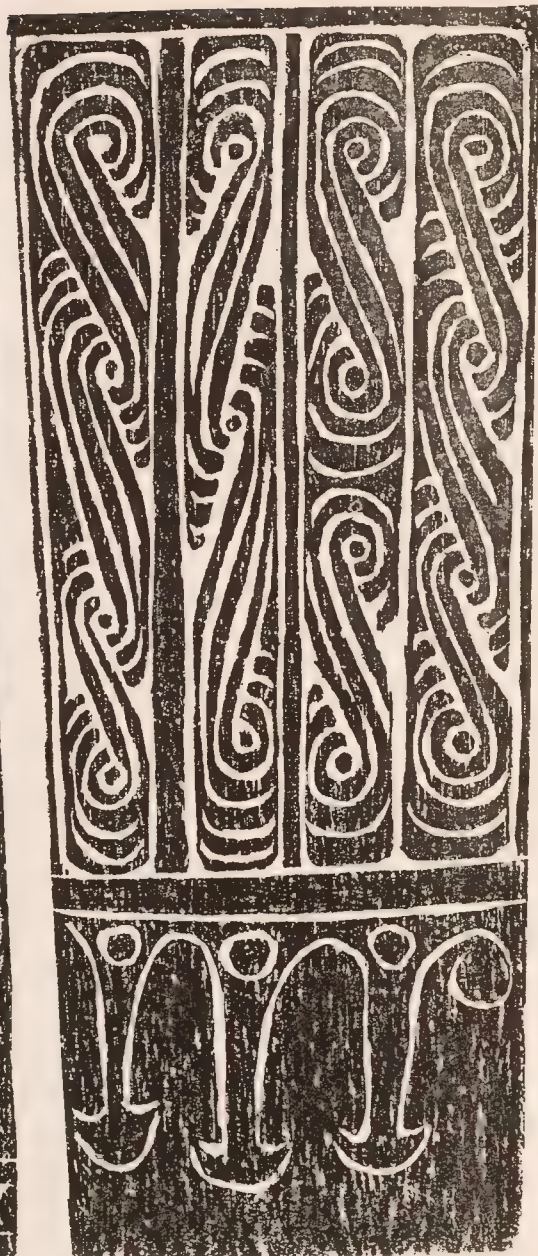




BIRD MOTIVES FROM CARVED ORNAMENTS.  
Massim District, Eastern New Guinea. Three-fifths actual size.



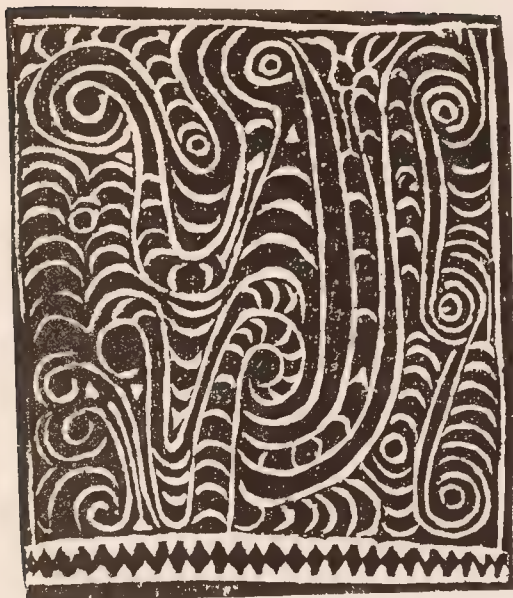
1



2

INCISED DESIGNS FROM FLAT WOODEN CLUBS.  
Massim District, Eastern New Guinea. Slightly reduced.





INCISED DESIGNS FROM CLUBS AND PADDLES.

Massim District, Eastern New Guinea. Two-thirds actual size.

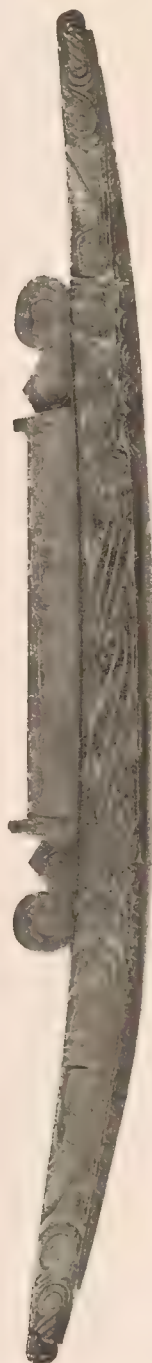




1



2

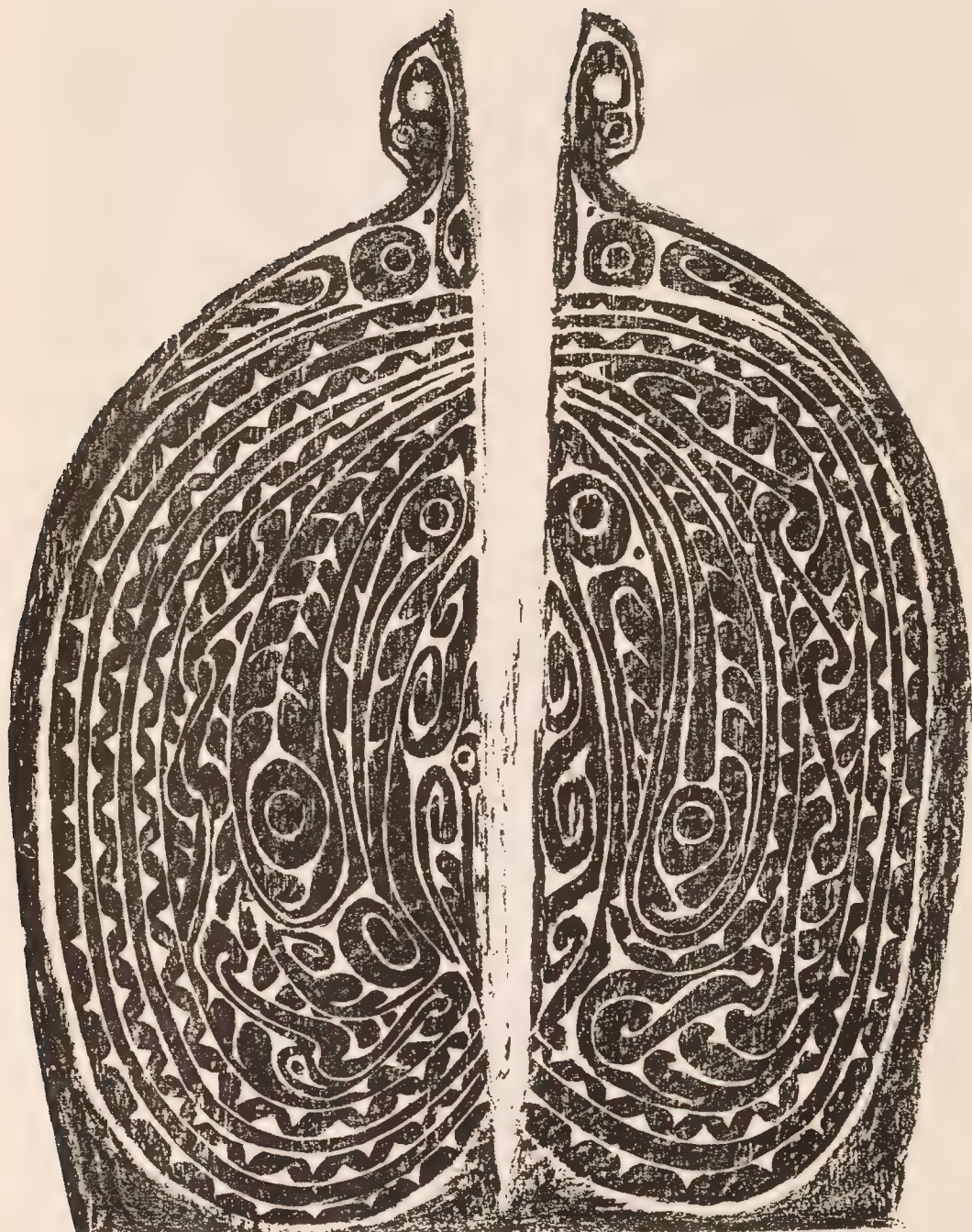


3

INCISED DESIGNS FROM THE MASSIM DISTRICT, EASTERN NEW GUINEA.

Fig. 1 is from a large club. Fig. 2 is from a small canoe-like carving, while Fig. 3 is from a photograph of the opposite side of the same object. Three-fifths actual size.





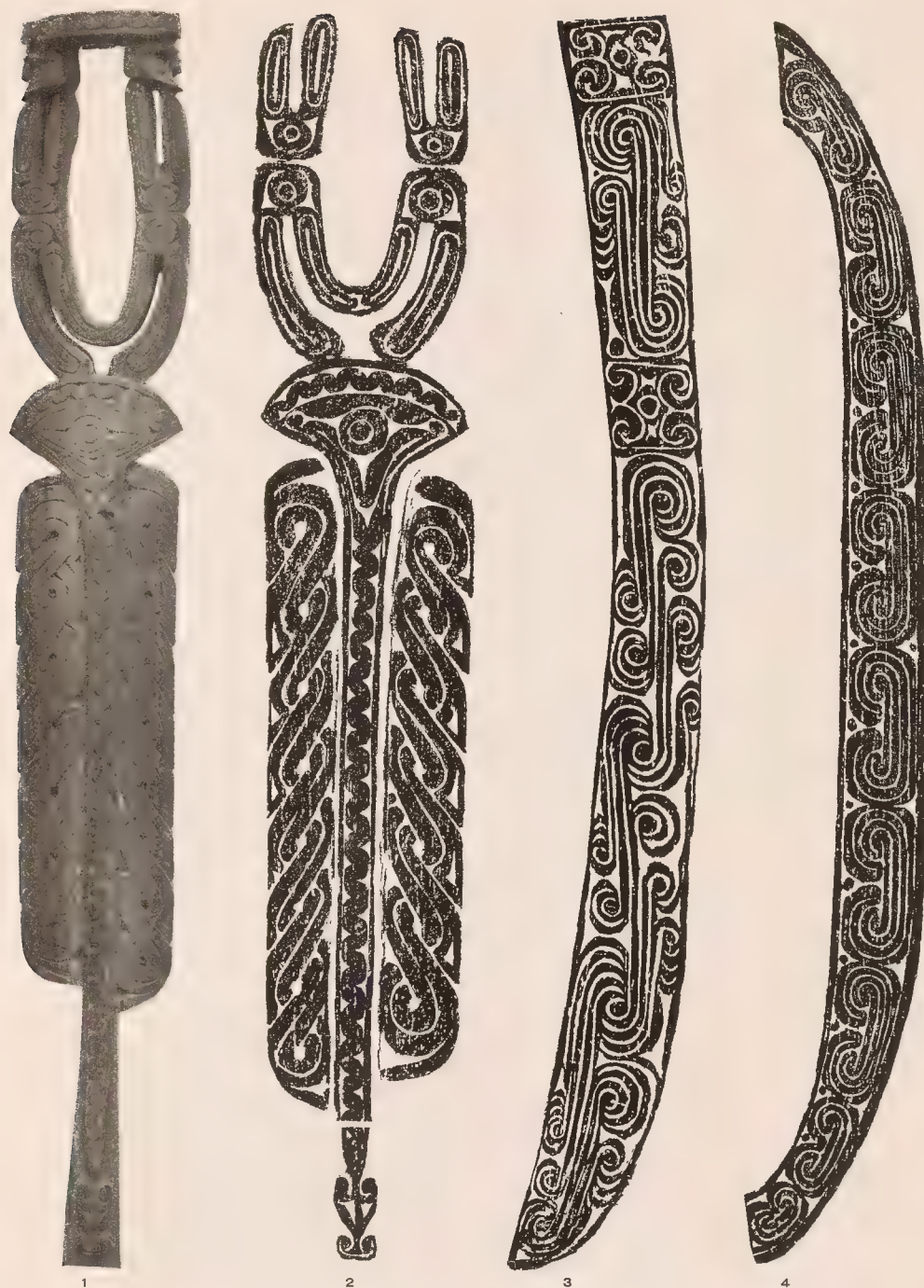
DESIGN ON THE UPPER PART OF A LARGE PADDLE.  
Massim District, Eastern New Guinea. Two-thirds actual size.



DESIGNS FROM THE MASSIM DISTRICT, EASTERN NEW GUINEA.

Fig. 2 is a rubbing of the opposite side of Fig. 1. Fig. 3 is part of the design on a similar carving. Four-fifth actual size.





DESIGNS FROM THE MASSIM DISTRICT, EASTERN NEW GUINEA.

Fig. 1 is the upper end of a lime spatula, while Fig. 2 is a rubbing of the opposite side. Figs. 3 and 4 are from small canoe-like carvings.  
Two-thirds actual size.



LIME SPATULAS FROM THE MASSIM DISTRICT, EASTERN NEW GUINEA.

Two-thirds actual size.





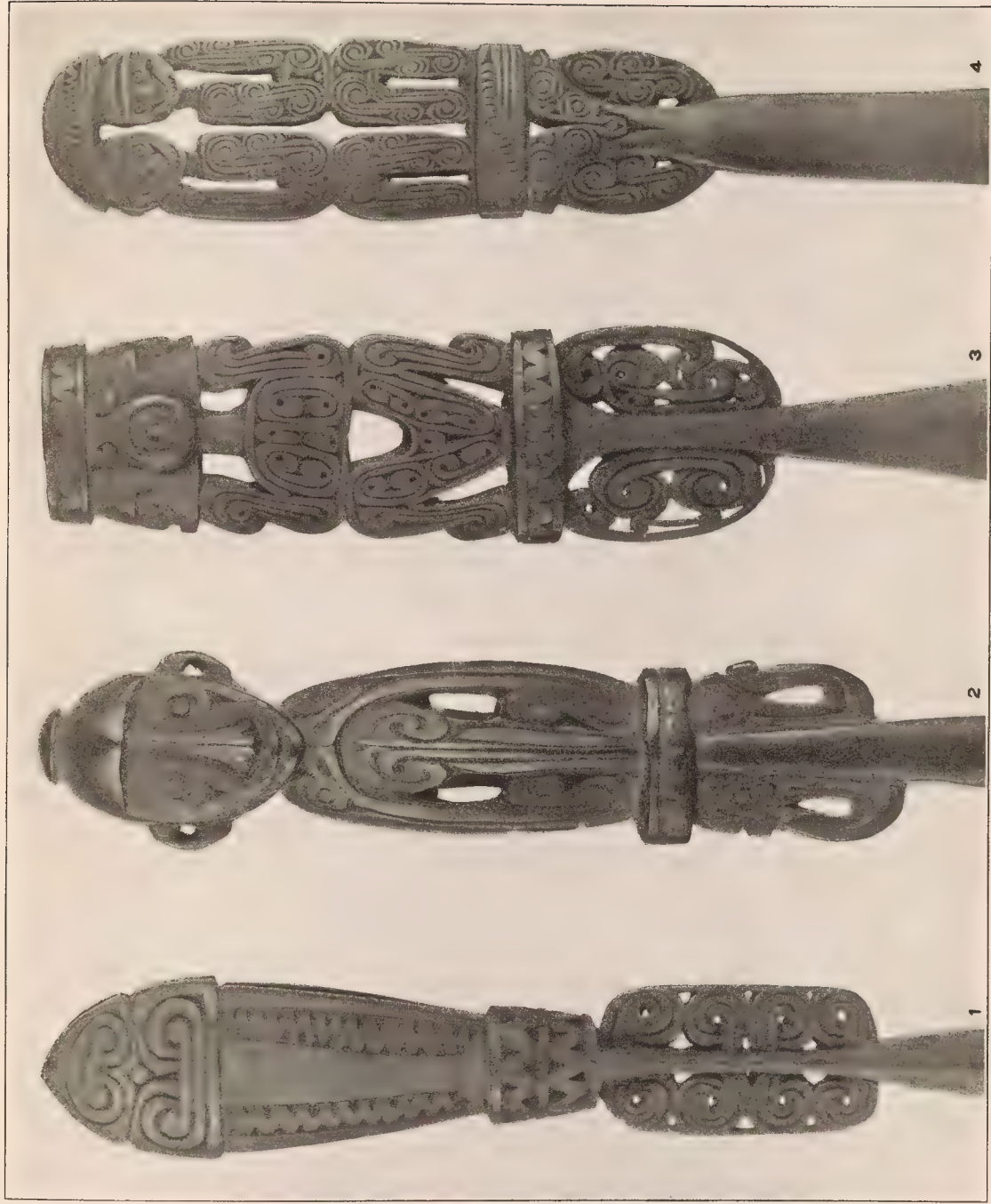
DESIGNS FROM LIME SPATULAS AND PART OF A SMALL CLUB.  
Massim District, Eastern New Guinea. Four-fifths actual size.



DESIGNS FROM LIME SPATULAS AND OTHER SMALL OBJECTS.

Fig. 7 is from Fig. 1, Plate XLI; Fig. 10 from Fig. 1, Plate XLIII; and Fig. 11 from the opposite side of Fig. 3, Plate XLIII. Fig. 6 is from the upper end of a round walking-stick, the long designs running down on each side. All from Massim District, Eastern New Guinea, except Fig. 3, which is from a bull-roarer from the Papuan Gulf.

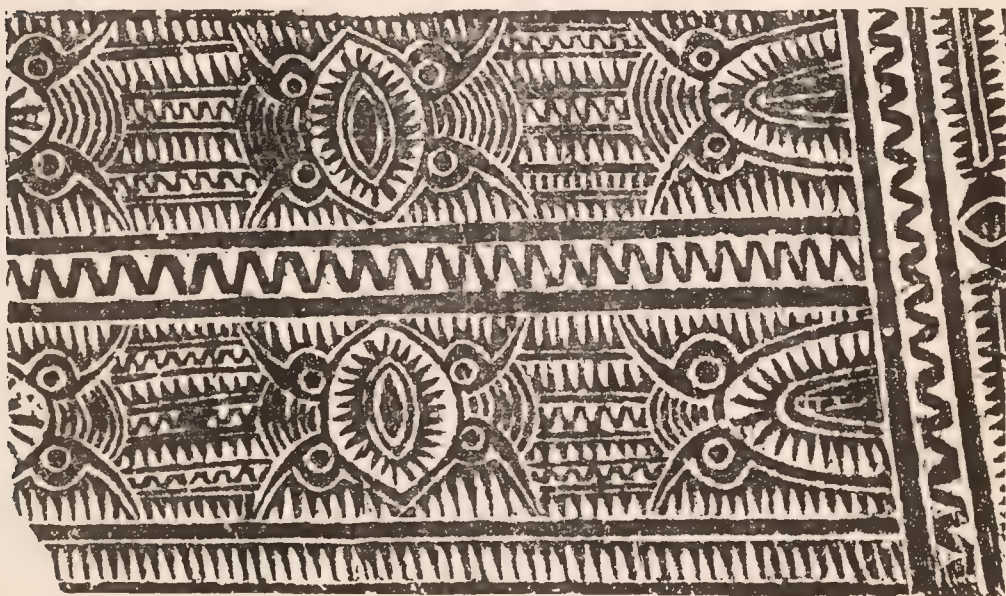




HANDLES OF LIME SPATULAS.  
Massim District, Eastern Guinea. Slightly reduced in size



1



2

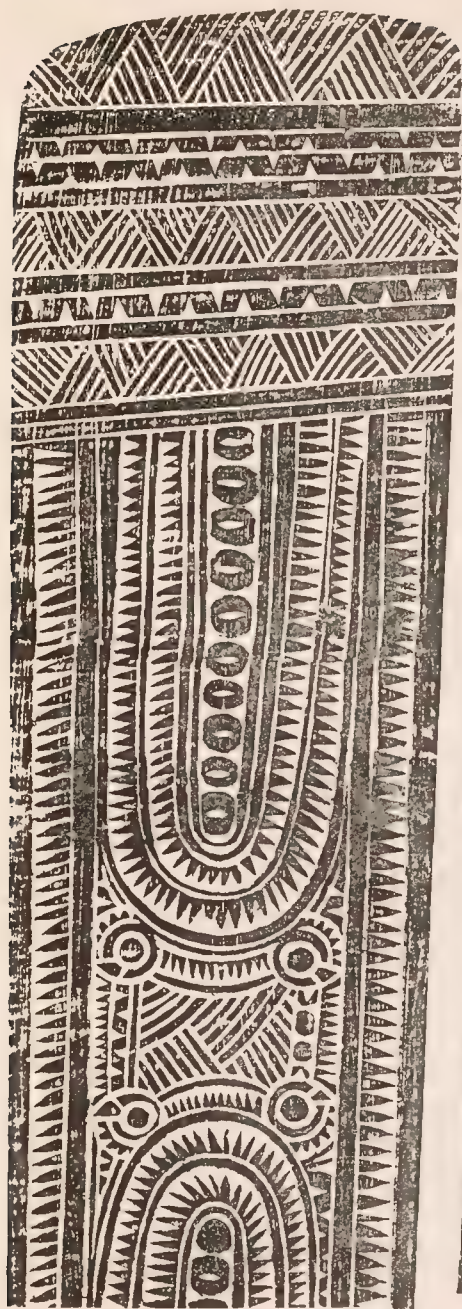


3

DESIGNS FROM TORTOISE-SHELL BRACELETS.

Huon Gulf, New Guinea. Actual size.





1

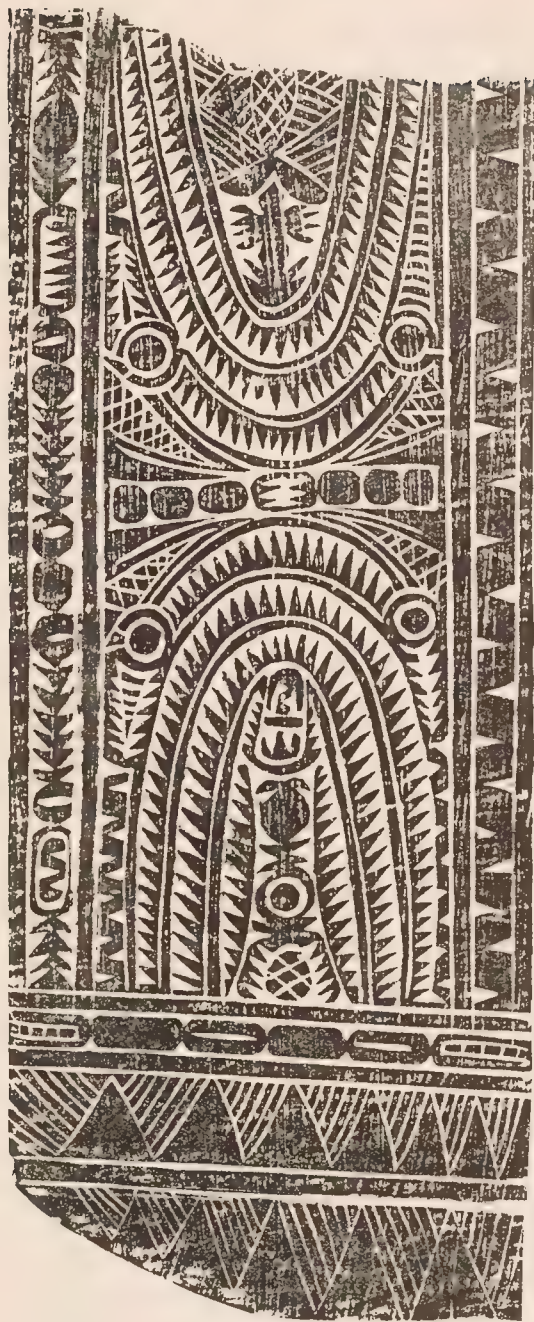


2

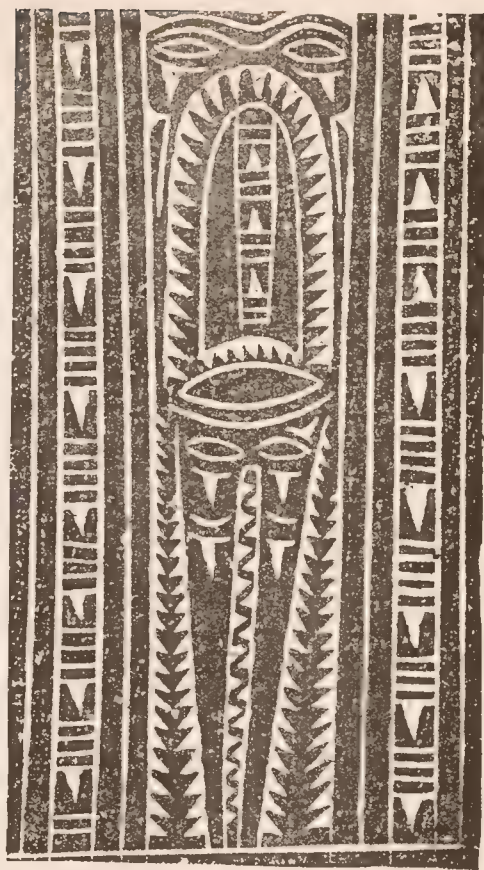
DESIGNS FROM TORTOISE-SHELL BRACELETS. HUON GULF, NEW GUINEA.

Actual size.

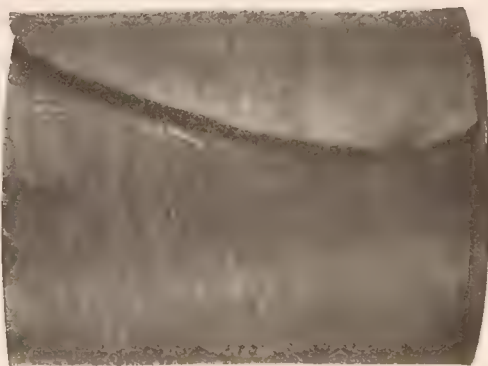




1



2



3

DESIGNS FROM TORTOISE-SHELL BRACELETS. HUON GULF, NEW GUINEA.

Fig. 3 represents a bracelet reproduced from a photograph; the design on this bracelet is shown in Fig. 1. Slightly reduced in size.





COCONUT-SHELL CUP FROM HUON GULF, NEW GUINEA.

Side and bottom view. Slightly reduced in size.



COCONUT SHELL CUPS FROM HUON GULF, NEW GUINEA.

Slightly reduced in size.





COCONUT-SHELL CUP FROM HUON GULF, NEW GUINEA.

Opposite sides. Slightly reduced in size.



COCONUT-SHELL CUPS FROM HUON GULF, NEW GUINEA.  
Slightly reduced in size.





COCONUT-SHELL CUPS FROM HUON GULF, NEW GUINEA.  
Slightly reduced in size.

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